

Notes on the Small Black Wallaroo *Macropus bernardus* (Rothschild, 1904) of Arnhem Land.

by S. A. PARKER*

Introduction

Ride (1970: 198) writes of this little-known species:

"... last collected in 1922 when three specimens were obtained by Mrs. P. Cahill at Oenpelli for the National Museum of Victoria. Earlier, in 1918, Mr. Cahill presented five specimens to Taronga Park Zoo. Previously it had been collected in Arnhem Land by J. T. Tunney in 1903 and K. Dahl in 1895".

The following observations are preliminary to the treatment of this species in a forthcoming checklist of the native land-mammals of the Northern Territory (Parker, in press).

Taxonomic status

Frith & Calaby (1969: 32) write: "*M. bernardus* is sympatric with *M. antilopinus* [Antilopine Wallaroo] over probably all of the former's range, but its relationship with nearby *M. robustus* [Euro] has not been satisfactorily cleared up. *M. robustus* is known to occur in the South Alligator River area near the range of *bernardus* and collections and observations should be made in the critical area to determine the possibilities of overlap or inter-breeding".

During September-October 1969, B. I. Bolton, D. Howe and I undertook a five-week faunal survey of the sandstone escarpment country of the Deaf Adder Creek valley 55 miles due south of Oenpelli. Here we ob-

served and collected both *M. bernardus* and *M. robustus* in the same rocky areas; on one occasion a female of each with pouch-young was obtained on the same hillside within a few minutes. Wilkins (1928: 168) observed *bernardus* in sandstone ranges fifteen miles up the King River north-east of Oenpelli in 1924; he collected a specimen of *robustus* in this area (BMNH 26.3.11.69) and another further east on the upper Goyder River (BMNH 26.3.11.68) (see Map 1). This evidence of sympatry, together with the clear and constant morphological differences between *bernardus* and *robustus* (see Table 1), justifies the recognition of *bernardus* as a separate species.

Field observations

Although *M. bernardus* has been found so far only in the escarpment country of western and north-western Arnhem Land, it is by no means rare there. In the sandstone gorges of Deaf Adder Creek valley we encountered this small, blackish, thickset wallaroo several times, always on boulder-strewn hillsides, singly and in pairs (once in a group of three). In the daytime it was wary, but a female (NTM 4748) located by eyeshine at night allowed a close approach. Our observations were too limited to detect any ecological differences between this species and *M. robustus*, which occurred in the same rocky habitat. In the same area *M. antilopinus* was recorded only on the flat valley floor.

In the National Museum of Victoria there is a note from Mrs. Marie

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Cahill to Professor W. Baldwin Spencer dated 9 April, 1923, pertaining to five specimens purchased of Mrs. Cahill the previous year:

"Kakadu name—Barr-ark. Food—grass and herbs. Lives in caves on Ranges. When frightened goes into dark caves. Killed by natives for food thus—spinifex set on fire causes dense smoke when animal can be approached quite easily, as smoke partly blinds animal, which stands rubbing its eyes".

Specimens examined

National Museum of Victoria: C6380-4, labelled "Oenpelli" (4) and "near East Alligator River" (1), collected in 1912-1914 by P. Cahill and purchased of his wife, Marie Cahill, in 1922 (not collected in 1922 as stated by Ride).

South Australian Museum: M282-4, collected on the [upper] Mary River in December 1913 by W. D. Dodd.

Northern Territory Museum: NTM 4737, 4748, 5413, collected 55 miles due south of Oenpelli on Deaf Adder Creek in September 1969 by

B. L. Bolton, D. Howe and S. A. Parker, the first specimens taken since 1918, a lapse of 51 years.

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REFERENCES

- Frith, H. J., & Calaby, J. H., 1969. Kangaroos. Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire.
 Ride, W. D. L., 1970. A Guide to the Native Mammals of Australia. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
 Wilkins, G. H., 1928. Undiscovered Australia, being an account of an expedition to tropical Australia to collect specimens of the rarer native fauna for the British Museum, 1923-1925. London.

TABLE 1.

	<i>M. bernardus</i>	<i>M. robustus</i> (Arnhem Land)
Vertical groove in outer face of i^2	Pronounced	Faint or absent
Sides of rostrum seen from above	Straight or v. slightly concave	Slightly convex
Length of nasal overhang	14-17 mm (6)	9-15 mm (6)
$\frac{\text{Length of nasal overhang}}{\text{Length of entire nasals}}$	0.24-0.29 (6)	0.18-0.20 (6)
Angle subtended by outer edges of nasals at tip	$\pm 40^\circ$	$\pm 60^\circ$

Some cranial and dental differences between *Macropus bernardus* and *M. robustus*.

- Macropus bernardus
- M. robustus



Distribution of *Macropus bernardus* and *M. robustus* in the northern N.T.

Naturalists in Bass Strait

by A. H. CHISHOLM

Although *The Literature of Australian Birds*, by H. M. Whittell (1954), is an extremely useful bibliography, and although its compiler uncovered numerous worthwhile items that had fallen into obscurity, it has at least one entry that is remarkably inadequate. This relates to the work of Donald Macdonald, who for many years was a distinguished nature and general writer on the staff of the Melbourne *Argus*.

Very surprisingly on the part of such a diligent and conscientious worker, Major Whittell not only overlooked Macdonald's books *Gum Boughs and Wattle Bloom* (1887) and the posthumous volume *The Brooks of Morning* (1933), each of which contains significant references to birds; but he failed also to record the many ornithological articles which Mac wrote—in addition to the highly useful columns of *Nature*

Notes—from year to year in the *Argus*.

I am reminded of this matter by the fact that, as in the case of Whittell, the authors of a recent substantial paper on certain islands of Bass Strait (*Vict. Nat.*, Dec. 1970), also appear to be unacquainted with relevant articles written by Macdonald in the *Argus* during 1908. Their author obtained his material as a member of the Ornithologists' Union party, which from 24 November (1908), spent a rewarding fortnight touring Bass Strait in a special steamer.

The titles of the Macdonald articles are: "The Life of the Sea", "Gannets of the Bass", and "An Island Race". All three are lengthy and, as a matter of course, all are thoroughly readable and informative. Indeed, they fired my youthful enthusiasm so strongly that I carefully